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Fisheries co-management as empowerment ☆

Svein Jentoft*

Norwegian College of Fishery Science, Department of Social Science, University of Tromso, Breivika, Tromso 9037, Norway

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Abstract

Empowerment is both a condition and a goal of fisheries co-management. In this paper I attempt to explain what empowerment means, what it requires, and what can be expected from it. The concept emphasizes psychological as well as sociological factors. It works at an individual and a collective level. For fisheries co-management to become sustainable, empowerment must occur at both levels. Thus, co-management entails more than institutional design and participatory democracy. It also requires capacity enhancement. The good news is that these processes are mutually dependent and reinforcing. They should therefore proceed hand in hand, and it does not matter very much which of them is undertaken first.

> Yes, empowerment, yes co-management will mean greater involvement, greater responsibility. But it will also mean finally having some voice in the future of our resources, of our industry and of our communities.
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> Piettro Parravano and Glen Spain: ''Fisheries Co-management, Empowerment and Responsibility for Fishermen.''
>
> The Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations. (http://www.pcffa.org/fn-apr00.htm)

1. Introduction

Empowerment is an issue with an extensive literature—not so much in fisheries as in areas such as psychology, public health, social work, and education. The fisheries co-management literature addresses this issue only implicitly, and not in great theoretical depth. My web-search revealed few publications on empowerment and fisheries co-management. Yet, when you think about it, empowerment is what co-management is all about, as it involves bringing previously excluded, disenfranchised and sometimes alienated user groups and stakeholders into the management decision-making process, by reshuffling power and responsibility among those who form the fisheries management chain. Indeed, we may conclude that if there is no empowerment, there is no co-management.

If empowerment is what co-management is about, then what is empowerment? Exactly how does it apply, and how does it come about? Is a reorganization of management authority all it takes to empower fishing people, and is empowerment something that can be done by a central authority or by someone from the outside? Or is it primarily an endogenous process—a personal experience that requires initiative on the part of those who are empowered: a kind of self-emancipation? I obviously need to dwell here on the concept of empowerment, its various definitions and the theories that have been developed. Consulting literature on public health, social psychology, social work and education is, I believe, helpful—even if the issue is fisheries co-management. Indeed, one might argue that fisheries co-management requires social work—at least in the broad sense of the term—as it builds new social roles and relations. It is also an effort that requires both time and energy [1].

Clearly, education must be an essential element, and psychological factors are at play, which suggests that the

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*Corresponding author. Tel.: +47-77-64-6000.
E-mail address: sveinje@nfh.uit.no (S. Jentoft).

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social and natural sciences do not provide all the knowledge it takes to build co-management. Thus, the discourses that take place within these other fields of inquiry are directly relevant and should have been integrated into the theory and practice of fisheries co-management a long time ago. This underscores the fact that fisheries co-management benefits from the insights of multiple academic disciplines, and could gain from other perspectives than those hitherto employed. It is time to bring the psychologists, the educationalists and the social workers on board.

I shall start by examining the concept of empowerment: what it entails and how it is employed. Secondly, I shall discuss the question of whether more empowerment is always better. Is there still a role for a central authority like the state? Thirdly, I shall discuss how the empowerment theory is relevant when the issue is fisheries co-management. My central argument is as follows: for fisheries co-management to become sustainable, empowerment must occur at both a collective and an individual level. Thus, co-management involves more than institutional design and participatory democracy. It also requires capacity building, which Berkes regards as "the sum of efforts needed to nurture, enhance, and utilize the skills and capabilities of people and institutions at all levels …" [2]. The good news is that these processes are mutually dependent and reinforcing, so it does not matter all that much which is undertaken first.

2. Empowerment defined[1]

The empowerment concept can be traced back to the feminist and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s (cf. [4]). It was also a key issue in adult education philosophies in the late 1960s and early 1970s, pioneered by Freire [5,6]. Empowerment is a theme within Rappaport's "community psychology" theory [7] and within health promotion. For instance, Swift and Levin [8] regard empowerment as a "mental health technology". Thus, as a tool and a strategy, empowerment has a wide application. It is seen as a way of enhancing people's possibilities and capabilities to get a better grip of their lives: empowerment increases the ability of the individual to predict, control and participate in society. It is perceived as an enabling process, in which individuals and communities can take responsibility and act effectively to safeguard or change their environment. Empowerment is a way out of helplessness and hopelessness in socio-political struggle; in many instances it is also liberation from exploitation and oppression. Consequently, Torre defines empowerment as "a process through which people become strong enough to participate within, share in the control of and influence, events and institutions affecting their lives" [9], while Rappaport's definition reads as follows: "Empowerment is a process, a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs" [7].

2.1. Social conflict

Most theories of empowerment have a conflict perspective at their roots. They assume that society is divided into groups and classes, with differing levels of control over scarce resources, and that empowerment implies a redistribution of the power that such control entails. This presumes that empowerment is a zero-sum game; that it cannot occur without disempowerment, where those who are being empowered are so doing at someone's expense. The basic idea here is that there is a fixed amount of power in society. Empowerment would, in that case, be concerned only with the redistribution of that power, not with increasing that total. Some forms of empowerment are clearly zero-sum, such as when property rights are vested within communities or with some other entities. Property rights empower the property holders while disempowering everyone else—those that are then excluded from enjoying the resource benefits that stream from that property. However, not all the components of empowerment are zero-sum -personal growth, for example. Zero-sum does not apply to the building of confidence, trust and solidarity among community members. Nor is co-management's enhancement of sound judgment.

Empowerment is partly psychological and partly social—the former emphasizing emotional qualities, the latter the importance of social interpersonal relations. Zimmerman and Rappaport [10] identify four dimensions of empowerment: *the personality, the cognitive, the motivational* and *the contextual.* The personality dimension refers to strengthened self-efficacy and self-confidence, the feeling of being able to master one's domain by one's own action. The cognitive dimension refers to the feeling of assurance that one has the knowledge and skills to handle one's affairs, to make an impact on the environment and to be effective in the political process. The motivational dimension concerns the willingness, desire and resolve to control one's environment and become involved in the political process. Finally, the contextual dimension involves collective action, the individual's awareness of environmental factors influencing his or her life situation, the ability to define problems and opportunities, and to exert influence on ecological, social and cultural conditions, individually or as a member of a group.

[1] In the following section I have benefited from Leena Eklund's summary of the basics of empowerment theory [3].

2.2. Psychological aspects

Rappaport [11] defines psychological empowerment as having a sense of control over one's life in terms of personality, cognition and motivation, expressed in feelings concerning self-esteem and self-worth, as well as the satisfaction of being able to make a difference within one's own environment, and the released energy of greater self-confidence and comfort. Psychological empowerment, according to Zimmerman and Rappaport, is also "the connection between a sense of personal competence, a desire for, and a willingness to take action in the public domain." [10]. An empowered person is one who has the ability to understand the forces that are impacting on himself or herself, who can analyze a social and political context critically, and who knows how to act in situations that demand a response. Empowerment in this interpretation cannot be given, but must be seized. It results from within the individual, for example, from gaining more experience and competence in participatory processes. Here, Zimmerman [12] depicts empowerment as "learned hopefulness". In this sense, psychological empowerment is both a precondition for, and an outcome of, co-management. It would also be one of co-management's most important goals.

Empowerment may also occur at a collective level. Thus, empowerment works at the level of the group, the community and the nation. It even applies to the formation of institutions for global governance. When, for instance, in recent years the international indigenous peoples' movement has gained considerable strength, we can certainly talk about empowerment taking place [13]. There is also an interchange between the levels. When individuals are empowered, so also are communities, provided that individuals are allowed to exercise their acquired powers—which is partly a question of organization. This suggests that individual empowerment is a compulsory, but not sufficient, condition for community empowerment—or for empowerment on a larger scale. Further, we would assume that the causal arrow also points in the opposite direction—in other words, from higher to lower levels—and that community empowerment, for instance, may be a vehicle in the empowerment of the individual. In some instance, the trickle down effect is negative, as when The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) regarding the 200-mile economic zones empowered the nation state, and as a consequence largely disempowered the local fishing community.

2.3. Community

With regard to community empowerment, Rissel includes "a raised level of psychological empowerment among its members, a political action component in which members have actively participated, and the achievement of some redistribution of resources or decision making favourable to the community or group in question" [14]. Psychological empowerment is thus contained within the concept of community empowerment, which additionally emphasizes the notions of political process, access to resources and collective choice. Wallerstein perceives community empowerment as a "social action process that promotes participation of people, organizations, and communities towards the goals of increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of community life, and social justice" [15]. Petersen [16], on the other hand, regards gaining control over information, improved organization and links to outside support, consciousness enhancement and gaining access to resources as the key elements of community empowerment. Clearly, therefore, community empowerment and co-management are, if not one and the same thing, at least closely related (see preamble). Thus, with regard to fisheries co-management, Raakjær Nielsen et al. [17] define empowerment as "a mechanism to give people within the fishing communities a change to influence their own future in order to cope with the impacts from globalization; competing use of freshwater and coastal environments; and others fisheries-related communities."

Not only is a community structural, institutional and territorial; it is also emotional. The community is a source of identity, attachment and belonging—and therefore empowerment. People find meaning and strength from being with others, even to the extent that this may have a therapeutic value. This aspect of community empowerment cannot easily be described or taught: it needs to be experienced, internalized and sensed. It also underpins the argument that co-management is a means of gaining support among users. When they share communal experience and responsibility, abiding by the rules becomes a moral commitment [18].

3. Limits to empowerment?

Co-management maintains an involvement on the part of the state in fisheries management. Could it, then, be argued that co-management is less than full empowerment? Can co-management be criticized for holding back, for not going all the way in empowering disenfranchised user groups? Some people insist that the state should withdraw completely and let the local communities handle their own affairs according to their cultural traditions and established practices. Others have argued that co-management only empowers the elite, thus entrenching inequities that already exist [19]. It could certainly be maintained that a co-management system that ignores existing power differentials and local customs in resource use is the opposite of empowerment

and contrary to co-management's ideals. There may, however, as I shall argue, be limits to empowerment. Consequently, more empowerment is not always better.

First, there is a public interest in fisheries management which the state has a responsibility to uphold, and one cannot expect user groups and stakeholders to look out for interests and concerns other than their own. Stakeholder democracy—as co-management institutes—can therefore only be an addition to citizen democracy. They both represent empowerment, but in different roles. Secondly, the state has something to offer that user groups cannot do without: legislative powers, financial resources and educational support. The state also provides a technical infrastructure (e.g. research) that fisheries management depends on. Co-management involving the state thus has an enabling function that would be removed if it were to withdraw. Without the state, user groups would be left alone, possibly helpless in trying to fend for themselves.

Thirdly, fisheries management intervenes in social relationships and processes of some complexity. User groups and stakeholders are in many ways interdependent; something that can be handled only by means of a truly democratic process that is equitable, just and transparent. If they were to be abandoned by the state, there is no guarantee that user groups would be able to live up to such noble principles. There is evidence that local fisheries management systems in some instances are repressive, unjust and ineffective in conflict resolution, and that traditional authority can sometimes be illegitimate and undemocratic. A democratic state can help to avoid fisheries management becoming victim of such tendencies.

These points I believe provide a rationale for continued state involvement in fisheries management. State abdication is therefore not an option. Despite this, there is data that suggests that at times the state wants to retain control for its own sake. Government agencies and those who work within them have their own interests and concerns. They are therefore stakeholders in their own right, and may be adamantly opposed to the idea of giving away their powers. One should not expect that administrators do so willingly, even if they can see that co-management has its merits. The state may also, despite good will, play a role in co-management that is less than constructive. Neither should we, as Cleaver reminds us, forget "the potential link between inclusion and possible sub ordination." Instead she insists that we would do well to examine issues of empowerment and subordination more critically, recognizing the fact that they are not diametrically opposed conditions." [20] Co-management holds promise for empowerment, but may instead lead to nothing more than business as usual, leading to frustration among disappointed users and stakeholders. In summarizing the African experience of fisheries co-management, Hara and Raakjær Nielsen conclude:

> Co-management has been applied and implemented instrumentally by governments. This has created a situation whereby the process in contrast to the intention, has not led to the empowerment of the local fishing population. The incentives for co-operation are primarily on the side of government, where fisher/fishing communities have realised that they continue to be recipients of instructions. [21].

No doubt co-management needs bold initiatives, which may be painful for some. The important thing to stress, though, is that co-management does not have to be a zero-sum game, but instead a process where all those involved gain, because they become better able to accomplish what they are capable of and thus realize what is in their common interest, i.e. securing the resource in a way that is profitable, equitable and just.

4. Lessons for co-management

All things considered, what does the empowerment concept convey to fisheries co-management? What are the lessons to be learned? I suggest the following:

In brief, empowerment is about enabling and authorizing. Fishing people are empowered when it becomes possible for them to sustainably manage their fishery. Capacity building is a means by which this may be accomplished. Fisheries management is clearly not for dummies, but a practice requiring a wide range of expertise, experience and skills. People are also empowered when they are allowed to do something from which they were previously barred, for instance when institutions are established that facilitate participation and secure rights. Co-management embodies this latter form of empowerment. But, as empowerment theory suggests, in order for co-management to work, the former type of empowerment is no less important. Capacity building and institution building are both necessary. How this works is illustrated below (Fig. 1).

This illustration attempts to capture how empowerment works in fisheries co-management. First it stresses the individual, psychological process of empowerment. Education plays an enabling role, giving the individual both competence and confidence. ("I know I can do it!") Secondly, the figure emphasizes empowerment as a collective process at a community level. People are empowered when they act in concert to form organizations, and when they acquire rights and responsibilities in fisheries management. ("We know we can do it!") In both instances, people have not only the conviction but also the resolve to take on co-management roles. The figure also shows that individual and collective empowering processes are interrelated: psychological

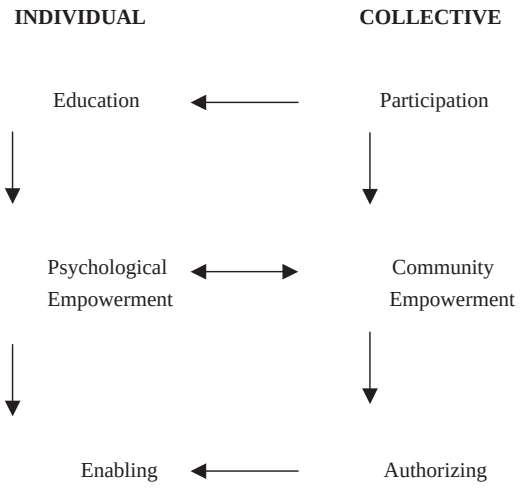

Fig. 1. The empowerment process.

empowerment at a communal level also works at an individual level. The individual gains strength through being a member of a group. The process also works in the opposite direction: through collective action, empowered individuals empower communities from within. Sociological communities also facilitate psychological empowerment. The community is a lived experience that provides interactive learning and boosts self-confidence. Finally, this illustration stresses that participation in decision-making is an institutional mechanism that allows user groups and stakeholders to influence the management system. But participatory democracy is also in itself a learning process [22]: users learn how to become competent and effective co-managers. They learn, for instance, how prepare for meetings, how to argue, how to listen to and respect other opinions, how to work out compromises and a consensus. Participatory democracy is best learned through participation. Learning from textbooks and brochures conveys the concepts but not the lessons of practical experience. Having said this, efforts must still be invested into educating and training user groups and stakeholders. We need to develop co-management study programs, guidelines, reading materials, manuals, checklists and role-plays. In order to produce teaching materials of this kind, we may need the assistance of education specialists. This is a job for the professional, not for the autodidact fisheries manager. There may even be a business opportunity here.

5. Conclusion

The interactive process, involving both psychological and sociological forces, should make the co-management enterprise easier. When people learn as they go along, they need not be fully competent when they start. The capacity building process can proceed hand in hand with the institution building process, and it does not matter very much which is undertaken first. But the co-management enterprise will still need support and leadership from someone who understands the concept, and has the required co-management experience and educational skills. Therefore, a good place to start the capacity building process is with the management agencies and the NGOs.

5.1. Institution

Co-management literature has emphasized the political and institutional components much more than the psychological component, thus underestimating an important prerequisite for co-management to become sustainable. If empowerment is essential to effective co-management, we need to be aware of the limitations of institutional design. Institutional change can happen overnight; psychological empowerment takes more time. This is well illustrated by Sowman in a South African co-management project case study:

> At the outset of the project, there was minimal involvement of the fishing community in activities and decisions affecting the management of the resource. In the initial months of the project, fishers were reluctant to voice their opinion at public meetings or in workshops with government officials. However, as the project developed, fishers increasingly became involved in various aspects of the research, through participation in the monitoring programme, mesh size experiment and socio-economic surveys, as well as participation in numerous meetings and capacity building workshops. …(A)s the project progressed, the fishers themselves took the lead in querying government decisions or actions they regarded as unjust [23].

Co-managers must learn to fill their new roles and to trust their skills. They must also, as Zimmerman [12] suggests, "learn to be hopeful." We cannot fully rely on what the proverb says: "Those elevated by God to higher office are also given the wisdom required to serve." We must hope that it also works the other way round: that those who are blessed with wisdom will also be elevated to higher office—if not always, then at least most of the time. It is true that people acquire knowledge in how to fill a role by exercising it, but who would rely on such a mechanism if we were talking about a pilot, a lawyer or a medical doctor? For fisheries managers it can scarcely be very different.

5.2. Patience

If empowerment needs to be a progressive process, which necessarily takes time, the same must be true for

co-management. As we remember, Rome was not built in a day. Neither is democracy. As Benjamin Barber recognizes: "Democratic success stories suggest that democracy is a slow, developmental process that comes into being not through a single magical moment of founding, but through a long evolution in which the founding is usually only a culminating symbolic process" [24]. The risk of disappointment is high if co-management is reduced to an institutional quick fix, without enabling co-management to be a process that develops gradually. Users need continuous training and practice. For empowerment to be sustainable, it must be built progressively, each psychological level of empowerment strengthened long enough, before proceeding to the next stage. Thus, we should not expect immediate results. A certain degree of patience is needed. Co-management requires competence building and confidence boosting among co-managers, and as co-management becomes more and more consolidated, so also does the co-managers' level of self-confidence.

5.3. Countervailing power

Empowerment does not necessarily imply the disarmament of the already powerful. As I have argued here, not all aspects of empowerment are zero-sum. Co-management is more a question of leveling the plainfield, by arming the disempowered stakeholders with the tools necessary to become equally as effective in the political process as other stakeholders, so that they can negotiate from strength rather than from an underdog position. As Sowman and colleagues maintain: "Empowerment is secured when resource users are in a position to participate as equal partners in negotiations, give input on management decisions, and ultimately achieve self-control" [25]. Empowerment therefore would imply the creation of countervailing power, as when people acquire education so that they can understand the forces that are impinging upon them. Countervailing power is also formed when communities organize, and by that become more effective in the management decision-making process.

5.4. Two-way process

If building community is essential to empowerment, it is also essential to co-management. As Pomeroy and Viswanathan argue: "Successful co-management and meaningful partnerships can only occur when the community is empowered and organized" [26]. People who feel mutually attached, who share a common goal, know how to co-operate and have trust in themselves and each other as a group, have a better chance of realizing co-management. But again, we should assume that the process works both ways. If designed properly, co-management should in itself build community. I believe this is a key condition and a central criterion in evaluation. A co-management system that builds community is more robust than a co-management system that does not, because its transaction costs will be lower due to improved communication and reduced internal conflict. Its adaptability to changing circumstances will be higher because co-managers will be more willing to compromise. The management system will enjoy more support because co-managers will tend to feel committed to, and obligated by, the decisions made. Again, therefore, it does not matter so much where one starts—with building community or co-management—as long as one is aware of the need for the community to make empowerment and, hence, co-management sustainable, and the fact that co-management must proceed hand in hand with other efforts to build community.

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